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**Fire, Medical, Law Enforcement Professionals & Fireworks Victim Urge
“Be Smart! Leave the Fireworks to the Professionals!”**

“State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, “There are better places to spend this Fourth of July than the emergency room, so be smart and leave the fireworks to the professionals.” He added, “Fireworks are unpredictable and the damage they cause may often last a life time.”

Coan was joined by Robert Albright who was injured by fireworks last July 4th, State Police members of the Fire and Explosion Investigation Section, Westwood Fire Chief William Scoble, President of the Fire Chiefs’ Association of Massachusetts, Dr. Chris Andreoli, Director of the Eye Trauma Service at the Mass. Eye and Ear Infirmary, Mary Liz Bilodeau, RN, MS, CS, BC, Acute Care Nurse Practitioner at the Sumner Redstone Burn Center at Massachusetts General Hospital, Peabody Fire Inspector Joseph DiFranco of the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts, and Erin Christianson, of SAFE Kids Greater Boston at the Boston Public Health Commission, at a press conference at the Houghton’s Pond in the Blue Hills Reservation. This diverse group of professionals spoke with a single voice to deliver the message, “Leave the fireworks to the professionals.”

Fireworks Cause Thousands of Eye Injuries

“Each year, fireworks cause approximately 2,000 eye injuries - some of which result in permanent injuries such as blindness,” said Dr. Chris Andreoli, Director of the Eye Trauma Service at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. “The majority of people affected are children and young adults. It is important to safeguard against these preventable tragedies by following simple guidelines: let professionals handle the fireworks, stay at least 500 feet away from any fireworks, and do not handle any unexploded fireworks,” he said.

Robert Albright, who lives in Metro west, was injured last July 4th when he peered down what was supposed to be an empty mortar tube. He suffered a severe eye injury and has lost most of his vision in his left eye. Albright said, “If I had to do it over again I would leave the fireworks alone, but in real life there are no second takes. I underestimated the power, the speed and the unpredictability of fireworks and will pay for that the rest of my life.”

Chief Scoble said, “The 4th of July is no holiday for firefighters! It is traditionally one of the busiest days for fire departments putting out fires, responding to medical emergencies and supervising the public fireworks displays to make sure they are safe.” He added, “Illegal fireworks such as bottle rockets only add to our burden. They are a frequent cause of building fires since they only have enough power to go as high as a porch, the roof or eaves of a building where they ignite a fire.”

Fireworks Caused Over \$1.6 Million in Losses in Past Decade

In the past decade Massachusetts has experienced 577 major fire and explosions from fireworks, causing 17 civilian injuries, nine fire service injuries, two deaths, and \$1.6 million in property loss – all in a state where consumer fireworks are illegal. A majority of these incidents took place during the week of the Fourth of July holiday.

One-Quarter of Fireworks Burn Victims Aged 10-14

In the same ten-year span, the state’s burn registry has had 51 reports of victims with burns extending over 5% of their body surface area. According to the Mass. Burn Injury Reporting System (M-BIRS), 60% of the fireworks burn victims treated at local emergency rooms for severe burns in the past decade were under the age of 18, and one-quarter were between 10 and 14 years old.

4,000 Children Under 14 Visit the Emergency Room

Erin Christianson of SAFE Kids Greater Boston said, “Each year more than 4,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in U.S. emergency rooms for injuries involving fireworks. Most of these injuries occur in the few weeks before and after the 4th of July. Don’t let kids play with fireworks and keep children under active supervision even at professional displays.”

Mary Liz Bilodeau RN, MS, CS, BC, Acute Care Nurse Practitioner at the Burn Center at Mass. General Hospital said, “Every year the 4th of July brings tragic injuries to our burn center. Many of these injuries occur when fireworks are used at backyard barbecues, campsites and other unapproved locations. The other common factor is that these injuries occur when used by amateurs who underestimate the danger.”

Set A Good Example for Our Children

Peabody fire inspector Joe DiFranco representing the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts said, “Grown-ups need to set a good example for children and leave the fireworks to the professionals. Children imitate what grownups do without thinking how dangerous it is or how easily they can get hurt. Moreover, where do children under the age of 14 get their fireworks if not from the adults around them?”

State Police Det. Lt. Martin Foley, commander of the Fire and Explosion Investigation Section said, “Fireworks are illegal in Massachusetts because they are so dangerous and all too often find their way into children’s hands.” He added, “What can be described as a little firecracker packs enough explosive to blow fingers right off hands. It is irresponsible to let children handle a little bomb.”

Illegal to Bring Fireworks into Massachusetts from Out-of-State

It is illegal to purchase fireworks in another state such as New Hampshire or Connecticut, and to then transport them into Massachusetts. Advertisers cannot be prohibited from advertising fireworks, but it is illegal to purchase fireworks through catalogues or over the Internet for delivery in this state. Many unhappy consumers have lost both their money and fireworks trying to circumvent the law.

Demonstration of Danger

Just how lethal fireworks can be, was shown in a startling demonstration conducted by the Department of Fire Services' Hazardous Devices Unit (a.k.a. the State Police bomb squad). Fireworks, typical of those confiscated by law enforcement authorities, were attached to plywood silhouettes of people. The damage done to the plywood forms was shocking as spectators were asked to imagine how much worse the damage would be to a child's body. Plywood is much more durable than the human form. Also shown, was how quickly a sparkler can ignite the sleeve of children's clothing, the damage aerial fireworks such as bottle rockets can do when their flight path encounters a human face and eyes.

Coan said, "This local group of fire, medical, health and law enforcement professionals joins with the national alliance of 21 health and safety organizations to advocate for a ban on consumer fireworks." He added, "Play it safe this holiday and enjoy the many supervised fireworks displays."